

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



School for Love

Olivia Manning

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About the Author

Olivia Manning, OBE, was born in Portsmouth, Hampshire, spent much of her youth in Ireland and, as she put it, had 'the usual Anglo-Irish sense of belonging nowhere'. She married just before the War and went abroad with her husband, R. D. Smith, a British Council lecturer in Bucharest. Her experiences there formed the basis of the work which makes up *The Balkan Trilogy*. As the Germans approached Athens, she and her husband evacuated to Egypt and ended up in Jerusalem, where her husband was put in charge of the Palestine Broadcasting Station. They returned to London in 1946 and lived there until her death in 1980.

Also by Olivia Manning

Novels

Artist for the Missing
A Different Face
The Doves of Venus
The Play Room
The Rain Forest

The Balkan Trilogy
The Great Fortune
The Spoilt City
Friends and Heroes

The Levant Trilogy
The Danger Tree
The Battle Lost and Won
The Sum of Things

Short Stories

Growing Up
A Romantic Hero

Olivia Manning

SCHOOL FOR LOVE



arrow books

To Robert Liddell

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When they reached the top of the hill from which the road snaked down in the Seven Sisters' bends, the driver nodded to the opposite hill and said: 'El-telq.' Felix knew that did not mean Jerusalem, although Jerusalem was over there.

He asked: 'El-telq?'

The driver smiled, shrugged, could not explain. Felix felt he ought to respond in some way. To show interest, he wound down the window and put his head out; the air, striking him with a glassy freshness, made him think of England. He had not been home since before the war when he was a small boy. That was the time his father had gone abroad alone and he and his mother had lived in Bath; the best time of all. Now, in spite of everything, the cold gave him a slight exhilaration. The exhilaration was painful, like blood returning to a cramped limb, for it seemed to him he had had no feelings at all since his mother's death. At once, of course, he was jolted by the realisation there was nothing to feel exhilarated about. He would never see his mother again. Not only that - he had now to face the real Miss Bohun. Ever since the letter arrived inviting him to Jerusalem, an imaginary Miss Bohun, exactly like his mother, had been standing in a doorway with her arms open for Felix. She was still there when the plane touched down at Lydda and while the taxi was taking him from the mild, flat seaboard up into mountains where rocks overhung the road as though an avalanche had been arrested in mid-descent. Now he knew there was not a chance she would be like his mother. For one thing, she was years older; she was older even than his father, who had always seemed elderly and remote. Although she was not related to him - Miss Bohun

had been an adopted child of his father's parents – Felix was afraid she might resemble his father. Another thing, Miss Bohun was a person whom his mother had not wanted to visit. Whenever his father had suggested a trip to Jerusalem, his mother had said: 'Oh no, dear one, not there. We'd have to see Ethel Bohun. I couldn't bear it.'

Felix shivered, not only with cold, but with a return of an old grief and sense of being lost in the world. He felt a slight nausea of apprehension. The driver, as though sensing this, drew his attention to distant, sharp-edged peaks, each tipped with a village and looking like a stronghold carved from living rock.

'All Arabs,' he said, 'and down there . . .' Felix gazed down into the valley where the settlements were green with cultivated fruit trees, 'Down there all Jews.'

Felix, ignorant of the problems of Palestine, nodded and thought this was probably some arrangement agreed on by both parties. On either side of the road the rocks were like great flints, the earth pinkish and bare as desert, and over all a silver glimmer fell from a dark sky. In the distance, on the uneven top of the hill that was their destination, a few towers began to rise: 'El Kuds,' said the driver, and Felix knew that meant Jerusalem, for some of the Iraqis called it that. The driver murmured again: 'El-telq,' then, remembering that Felix did not know what he meant, he distracted him by saying quickly: 'Here road very bad. These Seven Sisters very bad,' he was taking the bends at top speed so Felix was thrown from side to side as they zigzagged downhill: 'Turkish engineers think this very clever, yes, but I say no good. Bad for cars, bad for horses. Here in Turkish times horses smell their home and bolt, so very bad accidents,' he lifted a hand dramatically from the wheel and nearly had them off the tarmac on to the rocks.

'Very bad!' he shook his head sternly, then put two fingers into the pocket of the car-door and took out a caramel and offered it to Felix, 'Very good!' he said.

It was not until they had passed the first grey-stone houses of Jerusalem that Felix saw the cause of the brittle cold in the air and, even then, a moment passed before he realised what it was. 'Snow!' he said suddenly. The Arab nodded, pleased, and said for the third time: 'El-telq.'

It seemed to Felix he had seen snow before but he could not remember when. He had heard of it, had seen pictures of it, but now the sight of it touched him like a primordial memory; he could scarcely see the city for looking at the snow. They were driving down a long main street. Everything was built of stone, silver-grey, snow-capped, huddled under the blue snow light, looking like nothing so much as a wintry English village street. The driver ignored all this; it was not until they came to the centre of the new town and saw before them the Old City, walled like a fortress, the snow marking the crenellations and towers, that he announced again: 'El-Kuds,' then, swinging left, dropped down the hill to Herod's Gate. Without slowing, he stepped on the brake and the car stopped abruptly outside a gate set in a wall.

'Misboon house,' announced the driver.

Felix felt no surprise. In Baghdad he had seen, behind walls as unpromising as this, tiled courtyards full of jasmine and roses, fountains and little fretted platforms for musicians, and, opening on all sides, summer rooms painted like golden brocade. He hoped for as much within.

When he had settled with the driver and the car had backed with a rush to the main road and disappeared, Felix found himself alone for the first time – yes, for the first time in his life. In Baghdad, after his mother's death, there had always been the Shiptons; they had become bored by him and sent him off as quickly as they could when the chance came, yet they were there, people he knew and who had known his mother. Here he knew no one. He felt an acute loneliness that would have filled his eyes with tears had he

not thrown it off, angry with himself because now he was a boy, not a child.

He knocked on the gate. While waiting, he bent and touched the snow. It was greyish, glassy and wet, but to him it was a wonder and, being a natural thing, a consolation. No one came to the gate. He knocked again, then, at last, lifted the latch. Inside was a small courtyard, undecorated except by snow. Doors opened off on either side and at the end was the façade of the house. A woman stood beside one of the doors staring towards the gate. She looked small and dark against the white ground, a bundle of dark, shabby clothes, with a dark face, her head bound round with a black woollen scarf and her feet in Wellington boots. She called out in a resentful, nasal whine: 'You are wanting somesing?'

'Miss Bohun, please?'

'Ah, so? In there,' she pointed to the front door of the house, then went on watching as Felix dragged his luggage over the step and latched the gate behind him. Someone spoke to her in German from a side room; she answered in German. Felix, shut into the small courtyard in the strange, uncertain light, felt as though he had entered an enemy country.

His suitcases were heavy. He carried one of them at a run across to the porch, then returned for the other. As he did so, the woman went inside and slammed the door. Almost at the same moment a window opened in the upper part of the house and another woman put out her head. A strong voice echoed in the noiselessness of the snow: 'Who is that? Frau Leszno, where are you?'

Felix called up: 'It's Felix . . . Felix Latimer.'

'Felix? Oh, dear!' The window rattled to and he waited in the silence.

'My dear boy, come in, come in,' said Miss Bohun as she opened the door. 'This snow has disorganised everything. Frau Leszno is so bad-tempered to-day. We must make allowances, of course; any variation in routine gives extra

work to the servants. Wipe your feet. Now, if you can manage one of these bags, I'll take the other, and I'll show you up to your room.'

Miss Bohun was a tiny woman but she lifted the suitcase as though it were a feather. She hurried ahead while Felix struggled after with the other case. 'You've arrived between meals; an awkward time,' her voice sailed back to him. 'But you can get all nicely unpacked before tea.'

The front door had opened straight into a living-room. Here the floor tiles were marked with wet foot-prints. There was no fire and no light except a phosphorescent glimmer from a back window which was set, like a painting of iridescent whiteness, in the black wall.

'Oh,' said Felix, 'a garden! And the snow! Isn't it super?'

'You wouldn't think so if you had to do the housework.' Miss Bohun moved ahead with irritable quickness so Felix could not keep up with her. She paused on the stairs. Her face – featureless, like a long egg, in the gloom: her hair the same colour as her skin – was turned towards him but Felix was sure she was not looking at him.

'I'm so busy,' she said.

'Oh, sorry!' said Felix, trying to hurry. The stairs led up directly from the sitting-room to the landing. At the top Miss Bohun turned right and showed Felix to one of the two bedrooms overlooking the garden.

'Here you are,' she said, 'this is such a nice room. It gets all the sunlight. And my room's just opposite,' then she darted over to the window and closed it sharply. 'Don't want snow in here. When you're studying, you can have an oil-stove, but now you'll be busy unpacking so you won't need one. If you *should* happen to want me, I'm preparing the room at the front – but try not to disturb me, there's a good boy.'

Felix opened his mouth, but the door closed before he could speak. She was gone. Had she, or had she not, said she was preparing a room? If so, that meant someone else

was coming to the house. The thought heartened him – he had been unnerved by the German woman, by Miss Bohun herself, by a muddle of memories of horror stories about houses as dark and cold as this – but he was uncertain if he had heard her right. With all the servants there were in this part of the world, surely she would not be preparing a room herself? He opened the door and, with his heart thumping, tip-toed out to the landing. Yes, there was a sound of brushing coming from the front. As he listened, Miss Bohun's voice rose strong and tuneless:

‘I know not, oh, I know not
What social joys are there. . . .’

He hurried back to his room. Unused to real cold, he was chilled to the bone. Mr Shipton had said he would need an overcoat here, but there had not been time to buy one. As, with numbed, clumsy fingers, he struggled to unlock his cases, he longed for his mother to come into the room and give the world its normal look.

Reality was thrusting at him now through a sort of blanket of memory of her. As the 'plane that morning had passed over the dawn-lit Iraqi sands, he had slid into sleep; rather, he had slid back into the sleep from which he had scarcely wakened when Mr Shipton got him out of bed and drove him through the night silence to the airport. His setting out had been no more than a dream from which he had passed easily into that other dream still clinging like an atmosphere about him. In it he had seemed to be sailing with his mother on the Golden Horn. Shortly before his father was killed, they had rented a summer house on the Bosphorus. He had had a little boat of his own. In the dream he and his mother were together in the boat, skimming the surface as smoothly as a swan. It seemed to be early morning. A mist lay on the sea, very white but thinning here and there so the water beneath could be seen looking like green milk. The

mist hid the waterside buildings, but the cupolas and minarets of the mosques rose from it and hung as though baseless on the pearl sheen of the sky. The air was warm and delicate. A perfume of flowers came from the gardens so he knew it must be spring. When he smiled at his mother she smiled back with so much love and sweetness, he was filled with well-being. Transported by this delicious security, he moved to touch her, but his hand passed through nothingness. Then he saw she was fading out of sight. In an instant she would disappear. As he leant forward he wakened himself with his own cry. He had sat upright, surprised to find himself where he was, setting out into strangeness. . . . Then, remembering, he had glanced round, shamefaced, but there had been only two other people in the plane, officers, both asleep.

Now, re-dreaming his dream in memory, a noise startled him awake again. Someone was moving in the room below. It was nearly dark. He switched on the light and looked about him and suddenly realised all over again that his mother was lost to him. She was dead. Whatever happened, he could never see her, never speak to her, never hear her voice. It was no good feeling sorry for himself. She would never come into this room. He would have to manage without her.

As he hung up his clothes, he thought he would not mind so much if it were even the Shiptons moving about downstairs. Anyone known to him, rather than the people of this house. Indeed, the Shiptons had been very kind. They had taken him to their home when his mother fell ill. She had been ill, with typhoid, a long time; everyone had said she would get better but, instead, she had died. He had to stay on in the Shiptons' flat. They did not say anything about his going, but after the funeral he had felt a change in their attitude. Before that he had been a temporary guest and every time they went to the American Hospital his mother had told Mrs Shipton how grateful she was; after her

death there had been no one to appreciate their kindness except Felix and he obviously could not stay for ever. Mr Shipton wrote to Mrs Latimer's brother in England and tried to get Felix a passage home, but it was at the worst possible time. The ships were full of troops being withdrawn from the Middle East, and the few civilian passages were reserved for important people. Felix was put on a waiting-list; the weeks passed and he heard nothing. The Shiptons were still quite kind, but more and more casual. Felix was moved out of his room into the box-room because another guest came; then he was moved out of the box-room because Mr Shipton had 'flu and was afraid of infecting his wife, but when Mr Shipton got better he stayed on in the box-room. Felix had no room, nowhere of his own at all. A camp-bed was put up for him each night in the hall. Sometimes the servant forgot, and it was always awkward when the Shiptons gave a party. Even in his frantic need to get away, knowing he was staying too long, knowing he was not wanted, Felix did not think of Miss Bohun. Mr Shipton must have found out about her and written without telling Felix. When her letter came offering to 'take the poor boy for his expenses alone', Felix could have wept with relief that there was, after all, a solution. The letter came on the 27th December; it came when Felix was near despair, for the Shiptons had been invited to spend Christmas with friends in Mosul and had had to leave him in the flat alone. When they returned and found Miss Bohun's letter, they became quite nice again as though to make up for the long weeks of indifference, but within two days they had got him a seat on the 'plane to Lydda and packed him off.

Well, now, at any rate, he had a room of his own. He need not be in anyone's way. Except for its bareness and cold, the room was pleasant enough with its peaked Arab ceiling imitating a tent and its long, spear-shaped window let into a wall so thick that the sill made a window-seat. There was a small iron bedstead, a wardrobe, a table and chair, nothing

else - but he could put up some of his mother's embroideries as she had done whenever they moved to a new hotel or pension. 'So dull, darling,' she would say, 'but wait till I put up some of my pretties and then these will really be our rooms.'

He wondered what he should do now he had unpacked. There had been no time for breakfast and no food on the plane. He was almost past feeling hungry. He peered from the window. The light outside was a pure, dark blue, as though he were seeing it through blue glass. Some sleet was falling and as he watched it, it began to turn to rain. From the room below came a chink of crockery. Oh, tea-time! It made Felix feel better and the house seem less strange. When he heard Miss Bohun going downstairs, he decided to go down, too.

Out on the landing, he heard something clatter in the sitting-room. Miss Bohun called peevishly from the stairs: 'Oh, dear, Frau Leszno, what have you broken now?'

The German voice, twanging like a flat string, more peevish than Miss Bohun's, replied: 'Just such a little plate. It is nosing. In Jastrow we had a hundred such.'

'Well, there aren't a hundred such here.'

'No,' agreed Frau Leszno with sombre contempt.

Miss Bohun went on down, clicking her tongue and saying sadly: 'Really, Frau Leszno, you might help me to save!'

'So? For what should I help you to save? You have here mine dinner-table and mine six chairs, and mine horsehair sofa, and for me - what? Even my room is taken for sis spoilt boy while my Nikky sleeps in the kitchen.'

'That will do.' The change in Miss Bohun's voice was impressive. Frau Leszno said nothing more, but the door slammed as she went. Felix turned the corner diffidently. Miss Bohun was sitting at the tea-table, her eyes hidden behind her hand. She sighed deeply as she heard Felix's step and began to busy herself with the tea-cups. A single yellowish bulb of light hung over her head. He had felt sorry

for her as she sat there, a little, worried old lady with her hand to her brow; he thought how silly he had been to distrust her, but now he could see her face, he was disturbed again. Her face was so narrow there seemed scarcely room between the cheeks for the long, bone-thin nose and the compressed mouth. It looked to Felix like the face of some sort of large insect. Her hair, fairish and greyish, was bound in thin plaits round her head. Her eyelids, thick and pale, hid her eyes. She did not look up or smile as Felix sat down.

She said: 'I'm afraid Frau Leszno is being rather difficult – not for the first time, I may say; but she'll get over it. It's the war coming to an end. The Lesznos had some money and a house in Eastern Germany – actually they're Polish Jews but they fled to Germany during some pogrom or other – and now she thinks the Allies are going to send her back to spend the rest of her days in luxury. Dear me, if all . . .' Miss Bohun broke off abruptly as Frau Leszno pushed the front door open and came in, her black coat tight and damp-looking on her stout, little body, her boots trailing water, her round, red, commonplace face set in a brooding look of grievance. She wore black mittens, but her fingers stuck out cracked and red like a row of beef sausages. She pushed a plate of bread on to the table.

Felix moved uncomfortably under her stare. When the door slammed again, he said: 'Is she cross with me?'

'Take no notice of her.' Miss Bohun suddenly gave a decided movement of her shoulders that seemed to throw off Frau Leszno and everything to do with her. She lifted the bread-plate: 'Have a slice. I'm afraid there's nothing to put on to it but margarine. No doubt you fed very well in Baghdad. You'll find a difference here; none of the best people live much above starvation level here to-day. They have the satisfaction of knowing they are doing the right thing. I buy what I can afford and we always have something nourishing, even if it's plain, but I *won't* buy on the black

market. That brings us to the question of your keep.' For the first time her eyelids rose and she fixed Felix with small, critical, reddish-brown eyes, then her glance fell again. She continued: 'I do not wish to make a profit on you, Felix, but I'm a working-woman and, of course, running this house takes valuable time. I can't be expected to do it for nothing: but there! after tea we'll try and worry it out. Do you feel cold? You can put the fire on for a bit.'

Felix, who felt very cold, bent and snapped on the switch of a small electric fire.

Miss Bohun said: 'I know no one can take the place of your mother, Felix, but I'm a sort of relative – the only relative of any sort that you have out here – and I want to do what I can for you. It's my duty, anyway.'

Felix said: 'Thank you,' and tried out of gratitude to feel responsive, but the space between them seemed to echo with emptiness. Miss Bohun was so unlike his mother, and, for some reason, he felt sure that when she had raised her eyes and looked at him she had somehow expressed disappointment in him. Perhaps she had imagined he would be older, or younger, or better-looking, or a more unusual sort of boy. Anyway, she retired now into her own thoughts, eyes hidden, and he gave his attention to the meal of grey, gritty bread and tasteless tea. Then he heard a slight movement beside him. He looked down and cried out involuntarily in delight. As the bars of the fire had grown red, a Siamese cat had come out from somewhere and was moving towards the warmth. It looked a sad little cat, as lost as himself, and his heart seemed to swell with relief at the sight of something – something he could love.

Miss Bohun looked up, startled by his cry, then, seeing the cat, she sniffed and said: 'Oh, Faro. She was given to me. An army officer and his wife going back to England. The thoughtless way people take on animals here! They know they've got to leave them behind. I didn't want a fancy cat. I just wanted an ordinary backyard animal to catch rats.'

‘Doesn’t he catch rats?’ asked Felix.

“‘She”,’ Miss Bohun corrected him, ‘it’s a “she”. That’s another nuisance. Yes, she catches them – I’ll say that for her – but she won’t eat them. I have to go to the Old City and buy camel meat for her.’

‘She’s very quiet.’

‘She’s learnt to be quiet. When she first came she was a spoilt thing. The Peppers had spoilt her. They had no children, you know. She wanted to sit on my knee and get into my bed at night. “Oh, no, young woman,” I said, “you’re here to catch rats. Out into the garden you go, the woodshed’s full of them.” Then she tried to make up to the Lesznos. Well, they’d no time for her, either, so she stopped asking to be made a fuss of, but she still screams when she’s hungry. They’re selfish creatures.’

‘I could get her camel meat if it would help,’ said Felix.

Miss Bohun reflected a moment, as though about to accept this offer, then she shook her head: ‘They’d cheat you. I know how to deal with them. I’ve been in this country twenty years.’

When tea was finished Felix knelt down beside Faro and stroked her. She scarcely looked at him. He whispered: ‘Dear little cat, dear little cat,’ and as though stirred by the affection in his voice, she looked up, her eyes intelligent, and blue as flowers. She let Felix lift her and take her on to his knee while Miss Bohun went into the question of his keep.

‘Now,’ said Miss Bohun, ‘my idea is that we should share everything equally. I’ve made a list of household expenses.’ She sat down at her writing-desk and found among the muddle in her drawer a piece of paper on which she had written things like: Rent, Light, Heating, Telephone, Wages, Kerosene, Food, Upkeep of Garden, Wear and Tear of Furniture &c. She did not hand him the paper but, peering at it over her arm, he noticed she had put Telephone and Kerosene down twice. He did not like to mention this. He

noticed that the rent was only £5 a month and the wages of Frau Leszno, her son Nikky and the gardener together only £9 – but somehow, with one thing and another, the total in large figures at the bottom was £35. Miss Bohun ticked through the items quickly, read the total aloud, wrote it again and halved it: ‘There! Now, shall we call your share £21 – that’s £21 a month, of course. Actually, that’s the controlled price here, and it makes a nice round figure and helps me to cover expenses.’

Felix nodded, a little stunned. He had not dreamt that life with Miss Bohun would cost so much. His mother’s pension had died with her: obviously the Shiptons were right when they told him the lump sum left for his education and keep would not last long.

Miss Bohun smiled briefly and put the paper away. Then, hearing Faro’s purring rising like a dynamo, she said quickly and brightly: ‘Dear me, listen to that cat. I’ve never heard her purr like that before.’

‘She only wants to be loved,’ said Felix.

Miss Bohun frowned slightly, something odd in her expression: then, raising her eyelids again, she glanced at the boy and the cat and said: ‘Oh, well, if you’ve got the time to waste. I’m afraid I’ve a pupil coming, so, if you wouldn’t mind going up to your room, Felix. . . .’

‘Can I take Faro?’

‘Yes. Yes, I suppose so.’

He wanted to add: ‘And can I have an oil-stove?’ but Miss Bohun seemed so occupied by the papers on her desk that he hesitated too long to be able to speak. He went upstairs, holding Faro to his throat for warmth. At the top he noticed another flight, no more than a ladder between walls, that led up to what must be an attic; a curtain hung at the top in place of a door and through the holes in the fabric sparkled stars of light. So there was already someone else in the house! Well, perhaps things were not as bad as he had feared. Anyway, he had Faro. He went to his room and

began to put up his mother's favourite things. She had been a great collector of bazaar objects and had often said to people: 'I ought to have been an interior decorator. It's a gift, you know; I'd make a fortune if I were in Mayfair.' He had brought the little hammer and packet of nails which she always carried in her luggage, and now he hung over his bed a large Turkish embroidery, a repeating pattern of birds in gold thread on rose-pink silk. Over the desk he put a Persian painting of a gazelle-eyed girl holding a rose and, opposite it, a late Phanariot ikon almost entirely covered with brass. He went round hammering happily, imitating in his mind his mother's pleasure in these things, until, suddenly, his door burst open and Miss Bohun stood there looking very sour. Even so, she kept her eyelids down. This made her look strange, as though she were blind, when she raised her face to speak:

'What is this noise? Where did you get that hammer?'

'It's mine,' Felix breathed nervously.

'You should have asked me before doing this sort of thing. I don't want the walls spoilt.' That was all she said before she lifted her eye-lids and saw Faro curled on the thin Arab carpet that formed a bed-cover. She crossed the room and slapped her off indignantly, saying: 'I won't have cats on beds,' and went out, closing the door on Felix's apology.

When the dinner-bell rang and Felix went downstairs again, he saw with a lift of his spirits that three places were laid at the table.

'Does someone else live here?' he asked.

Miss Bohun glanced at the third place as though unable to account for it herself, then she said: 'Oh yes, old Mr Jewel. He's up in the attic.' Her tone implied that there was something rather unpleasant about Mr Jewel. She clicked her tongue and murmured: 'Really, he's late again for dinner. I suppose one must excuse him, he knows no better.' She picked up the dinner-bell that stood at her right hand, gave it a sharp ring, then went on murmuring: '. . . and

when he uses the bathroom! People have to grow old, of course, I'm not denying it, but . . . oh dear, I don't know!' As she ladled out the soup, she sighed, making Felix feel uneasy as though with guilt.

Slow and very careful footsteps began descending from the top of the house, but Miss Bohun appeared to hear nothing. She sighed again and said: 'I'm tired. You must not be surprised, Felix, if you sometimes find me thoughtful or tired. You see, I'm a pastor. I have my own little church, my own little flock, and I have to give so much to them. So much. Also, as you will have noticed, I have my troubles here as well - all the result of giving a home to those unwanted elsewhere. I have only tried to be kind, only tried to be good.'

Felix felt embarrassed, but he was also much moved. Miss Bohun had been kind to him, too; she had given him a home when he was unwanted elsewhere. She glanced up to find him gazing at her, his cheeks pink, his eyes round with gratitude, and a slight smile and warmth of colour touched her own face. 'One day, perhaps,' she said, 'I'll tell you about my religion,' then she broke off as Mr Jewel at last reached the lower stairs.

He was a little, old man, with a square, snub face that even now, grey and worn with old age as it was, looked more like the face of a school-boy than of a man. He grinned at Felix and gave a sort of salute by lifting a knotted hand to the grey stubble over his ears. Miss Bohun did not look at him or introduce him. Felix, smiling back at him, said: 'How do you do?' as though there had been no omission. Mr Jewel nodded in reply. He lowered himself slowly into his chair but, once in it, he set about his soup without a pause, making a lot of noise as it went down. Miss Bohun's mouth turned down. As soon as the soup was finished, Mr Jewel waited for the next course, holding to the sides of his chair and giving quick glances at the door through which Frau Leszno would enter. Felix watched him happily, feeling that Mr Jewel's

presence had taken a weight from the air. It was evident, however, that Miss Bohun did not feel like that. Once or twice she sighed deeply and she had nothing to say. Frau Leszno came in with a plate of greenish mash.

‘I hope you like beans done in this way,’ Miss Bohun said to Felix, ‘they’re so good for you. When I was at school we used to be shown how beans burnt with a blue flame, just the same as meat. That means they’re full of carbohydrates.’

Mr Jewel did not speak throughout the meal. After a long silence had followed Miss Bohun’s remark about the beans, Felix managed to ask: ‘Could I have a plug put in for a reading-lamp, Miss Bohun?’

She frowned down at her beans: ‘You don’t need two lights in that room.’

‘I’d rather have a reading-lamp. I brought my mother’s. It’s a Venetian glass bottle, ruby glass with gold on it, and she made the shade herself. I’d like to have it. I’ll pay for the plug, of course.’

‘Oh dear!’ said Miss Bohun as though beset on all sides. ‘Well, if you mean to pay for it, I suppose I can’t refuse; but only one light burning at a time, mind you.’

Felix promised.

When he had finished the last course, of bread pudding, Mr Jewel at once started the ascent to the attic. Miss Bohun said in very bright tones to Felix: ‘Well, I must be off to my “Ever-Readies”. Wet or fine, the “Ever-Readies” shine. Perhaps you’d like a hot bath after your journey? Just ask Frau Leszno to light the boiler. I’m afraid there’s no electric light in the bathroom. You’ll have to take this little lamp.’ She put on a raincoat, bound her head in a ginger-coloured scarf, and went with a light step from the house.

The thought of the hot bath cheered Felix. When Frau Leszno came in to clear the table he asked her politely if she would be kind enough to light the boiler. She gave him a bleak stare from her pale, globular eyes, then seemed